

**Prince Edward Island
PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT / RETENTION
&
MEDICAL EDUCATION STRATEGY**

2006

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Prince Edward Island Physician Recruitment/Retention & Medical Education Strategy

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Prince Edward Island Physician Recruitment/Retention & Medical Education Strategy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mandate of the Prince Edward Island Department of Health (DH) is to *work in partnership with the citizens to protect, promote and improve the health and independence of all Islanders*. This mandate is fulfilled, in part, by ensuring that Islanders have continued access to physician services by recruiting new skilled physicians and supporting existing physicians in the province. In April 2000, the Prince Edward Island Physician Recruitment Program was implemented to address a serious shortage of both family and specialty physicians in the province. A total of \$4.2 million over 4 years was committed by government to assist with physician recruitment and medical education. This plan was a twelve point plan focusing on family practice training opportunities, specialist training opportunities, new medical school seats, medical trainee sponsorships, Canada Student Loan assistance, location grants, relocation cost assistance, locum support, continuing medical education, dedicated recruiter, enhanced recruitment resources, and international medical graduates' training programs

Since April, 2000, more than 90 new doctors have been recruited to PEI. During this time some doctors have chosen to leave, however there has been a significant net-gain in the numbers of doctors we currently have. Physician numbers have increased from 149 in 1996 to our current level of 182 active full-time physicians and we have increased our funding from 157 positions in 1996 to our currently available 202 physician positions in 2006.

Islanders need to understand that physician recruitment is a never-ending story. Because of the North American shortage of physicians, they have the ability to relocate when a new opportunity arises or when they need to make a change. There are a number of reasons why physicians would want to make a change, the most common being: family reasons, educational opportunities, professional changes, community and cultural issues, and spousal employment opportunities. Other factors contributing to a constant state of change are that physicians can become ill themselves and they also wish to retire after a long and productive career.

The newer graduate physician workforce is changing. There are more female physicians and most medical graduates are looking for practice style which would allow them to balance workload with family and other interests. This is leading to government to continuously re-evaluate and increase the overall numbers of physicians in order to ensure all Islanders have access to a family physician and specialist if required.

Government remains acutely aware of ongoing doctor shortages, however, it feels it is important for Islanders to know we have a stable base of doctors and this base continues to expand in small increments each year. It is the goal of our government to plan physician resources such that every Islander will have a Family Physician to coordinate their health care.

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The provincial government is committed to ensuring an adequate supply of physicians. Funding for Physician Recruitment/Retention and Medical Education has continued beyond the four years. Since April 2000 and including this latest fiscal year, the province has spent approximately \$10.1 million. Due to its success, government has endorsed the plan as a long-term, on-going program. Recent departmental reorganization has altered the service delivery of the plan without any change to its original intent.

The new *PEI Enhanced Physician Recruitment/Retention and Medical Education Strategy* is an integrated and comprehensive approach to the education, recruitment and retention of physicians for practice on PEI. Its mission is *to provide appropriate health care in all communities in PEI; to promote, maintain, and improve the health of its residents; and enhance the career, educational opportunities, and personal life of its physicians.*

Studies show that recruitment and retention of physicians is affected by two major categories of issues, professional and lifestyle issues, and that multidimensional programs appear more successful than those relying on financial incentives alone. The new strategy differs from the original plan in that its focus expands beyond financial incentives alone to recruit physicians. It builds upon strengths of the original plan of April 2000 by continuing and/or enhancing existing initiatives while introducing new ones. The strategy has an expanded focus, addressing professional practice and personal issues in addition to the financial concerns of physicians.

Negotiations for the Physician Master Agreement in 2004 allowed both government and physicians to remove some of the barriers to recruitment and helped to ensure Island physicians are paid a competitive rate to other Maritime provinces. This 2004 Physician Master Agreement involved intense negotiations between government and the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island to reach our current three year agreement. This contract helps us remain competitive with our sister Maritime provinces to attract and keep our physicians while living within our means. The agreement recognized the majority of our doctors wish to remain on the fee-for-service system while also recognizing the physicians who wish to be paid either salary or on a contract basis. These non fee-for-service (alternate pay) options have allowed us to provide service to our smaller communities and enhance our recruitment and retention efforts. The importance of these alternate payment models have provided a significant shift in physician compensation from 21 doctors (14 %) in 2000 to 77 doctors (42 %) in 2006. These are primarily rural physicians and specialists at both the Prince County Hospital and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

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We will begin new negotiations with the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island in October, 2006 and hope to build on the success of our 2004 negotiations.

New physicians entering the health care system have indicated they are not willing to follow the long hours previously associated with the traditional physician role. They want to work in team settings, they want to work with other health care providers, and they want to take advantage of emerging health care technologies that will help them care for patients and provide a balanced work and personal life. Government recognizes how we plan physician resources in the future will require better planning tools than we have used traditionally. We have started that process through our province-wide Physician Resource Planning Committee which has representatives from both government and the Medical Society of PEI. In the fall of 2005 we conducted a consultative workshop on physician recruitment. Prior to that and since then, we have listened to a number of physicians who have offered suggestions to improve recruitment and retention.

Our commitment to ensuring Islanders have access to Family Physicians and Specialists translates into a \$60 Million expenditure in the 2006/07 fiscal year, which is almost double the 2000/01 commitment of \$33 Million.

PEI wants to attract physicians who wish to choose the Island as a place to work and live. In addition to competitive financial incentives, PEI has significant recruitment advantages in its medical practice opportunities and modern medical facilities, the Island's natural beauty and safe environment, and its communities' general collegiality. This message needs to reach as many prospective and current physicians as possible. Recruitment and retention is a shared responsibility and success demands increased involvement from everyone - the Department of Health and its designated recruitment staff, Island physicians and medical office staff, and individual communities and their leaders.

The intent of this report is to outline the on-going *Physician Recruitment/Retention and Medical Education Strategy* in a summarized format. This summary report will be followed by a detailed implementation plan for the program.

INTRODUCTION:

The new *PEI Enhanced Physician Recruitment/Retention & Medical Education Strategy* offers initiatives which address the financial, professional, and lifestyle concerns of today's physicians by targeting three distinct groups: physicians in training, physicians being recruited to the Island, and physicians currently in practice on PEI. The initiatives are aimed at each of these different groups, yet they are designed to support and build upon each other.

Family physicians are the foundation for publically-funded and accessible health care. They are usually a patient's first point of entry into the health care system. At the present time, approximately 4000 Islanders are registered with the Department of Health's Patient Registry as seeking a family doctor. With 138,900 Islanders registered with our Medicare office, this means 97.1% of Islanders currently have a family doctor which is well above the national average of 85.8% recently reported by Statistics Canada.

The health system is enhanced by the support of other health professionals as well and the Department is continuing in its efforts to expand Family Health Centers with health care teams working to support front line health care.

1. Medical Education Initiatives

1.1 Medical Student Training Opportunities:

Family practice training on PEI occurs in two stages. The first is a Medical Education component during their university based training and allows Medical Students to do clinical rotations with Island Physicians.

The Medical Education component provides a centralized, coordinated approach for the teaching of undergraduate medical students and medical residents on the Island. The program continues to be led by a PEI family physician supported by a half-time coordinator. Traditionally the program provided clinical rotations to Dalhousie University medical students and residents in family medicine, obstetrics/gynecology, and pediatrics. Requests are now received from medical schools across Canada and rotations are set up with qualified preceptors to provide the clinical training in family and specialty medicine.

The second component of Family Practice training occurs once the Medical Student graduates and pursues a career in Family Medicine. These students undergo a two-year family medicine residency training program.

Medical students and residents have the opportunity to work closely with Island physicians and experience the clinical practice and lifestyle which PEI has to offer. Since the beginning of the program the number of clinical rotations occurring on PEI has increased to more than 85 per year, and has expanded from three areas of medicine to seventeen.

Training experiences are now provided in: family medicine, obstetrics/gynecology, pediatrics, anaesthesia, emergency medicine, general surgery, geriatric medicine, internal medicine, oncology, ophthalmology, orthopedic surgery, otolaryncology, pathology, physical medicine, psychiatry, radiology, and urology.

1.2 Medical School Seats

Since 2000, two undergraduate medical school seats are assured annually for Island medical students through agreements with Memorial University. Dalhousie University traditionally averages six Island based medical students through their merit based entrance requirements. Funding for these seats is via the PEI Department of Education.

A Maritime agreement ensures that each year one new francophone student from Prince Edward Island is accepted into a Quebec medical school: either Sherbrooke, McGill or Laval University.

The Department of Health will continue these programs which, to date, have allowed ten Island students to study at Memorial University and has allowed many others to study at Dalhousie University towards their medical career.

1.3 Student/Resident Incentives

Island medical students and medical residents studying in Canadian universities are eligible for incentives, including the following:

- A financial assistance program provides funding to medical students and residents for travel and accommodation expenses while completing clinical rotations on the Island.
- Complimentary gym passes are also available to medical students and residents completing clinical rotations on PEI.
- A stethoscope and diagnostic kit are offered to first year Island medical students attending a Canadian medical school.
- A book allowance is available to second and third year Island students studying in Canadian medical schools. This allowance will increase.
- Events are hosted throughout the year, some in cooperation with the Medical Society of PEI. Such events include a summer barbecue and a Christmas social.
- Department of Health staff visit medical schools and attend job fairs to maintain contact with medical students and residents who may be potentially recruited to the Island.
- Provincial representatives arrange for medical students and residents to visit high schools to promote medicine as a career and the Island as a place to practice.
- Recruitment staff will continue to correspond regularly with medical students and medical residents throughout the year via e-mail, newsletters, cards, and letters.

1.4 Student Summer Program

The province provides funding to the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island to administer a summer student program. The *Summer Program for Students* is a unique ten week placement working alongside family physicians and specialists in various settings across the Island. The program is aimed at first and second year Island medical students, providing experience in most specialties, practice settings, and several community-based services on PEI. Each medical student is paid bi-weekly for the ten weeks. This initiative provides the student with exposure to medical practice in PEI with the hope of influencing their future practice choice. This program has proven popular with both medical students and physicians.

2. Recruitment Initiatives

2.1 Medical Residency Debt Reduction Program

The Medical Residency Debt Reduction Program is designed to offer incentives to medical residents to come to PEI to practice. The program provides funding in the form of a return-in-service grant. Sponsorships are available to residents in training who agree to return to PEI to practice for a minimum of two years. Currently family physicians are offered \$20,000 and specialists are offered \$25,000. These amounts will be increased to \$30,000 and \$40,000 respectively. These increases will allow PEI to remain competitive with other provinces. These amounts are larger than those offered to established physicians in recognition of the high tuition rates and significant student debt loads currently being faced by medical students. Physicians who receive this grant are not eligible for a Return-in-Service grant nor moving expense assistant.

2.2 The Professional Association of Residents in the Maritime Provinces (PARI-MP) Partnership

A partnership has been entered into with PARI-MP for the delivery of a Maritime Physician Recruitment Initiative. The aim of this initiative is to assist in the recruitment of physicians to PEI and to provide communities with a forum to market themselves to graduating residents. The program will give Island recruitment direct access to residents training in the Maritimes. Other benefits include well-advertised and promoted Job Fairs, resident events, and a secure website registry where communities and health centers in need of physicians can put their vacancies and residents in turn can search for employment opportunities. The program will allow the province to promote and match these employment opportunities directly to our residents. This includes meeting with each residency program, specifically targeting senior residents, and encouraging them to contact prospective communities.

2.3 Site Visits

Site visits are funded to provide prospective physicians an opportunity to visit the province and get a first hand look at the working environment and Island lifestyle. Physicians and spouses/families are invited to PEI to visit, typically for three to five days.

While on the Island, potential recruits tour hospitals and medical facilities and are introduced to medical staff.

It is a chance to visit Island communities and experience the natural beauty and relaxed lifestyle.

Under our enhanced program, these site visits will be coordinated between community physicians and community leaders. This will allow individual communities an opportunity to meet physicians interested in their facilities and allow the community to showcase themselves in a more coordinated fashion.

2.4 Return-in-Service Grants

Return-in-service grants are offered to newly-recruited physicians relocating to fill a vacancy in the province. Grants of \$10,000 were offered, with \$5,000 bonuses available to physicians willing to commit to two years or beyond, physicians committing to practice in rural communities, and to specialist physicians. These grants are being increased to \$20,000 for family physicians and \$30,000 for specialists.

This initiative will continue to be supported and enhanced as required, allowing PEI to remain competitive with other provinces.

2.5 Moving Allowance

A relocation cost assistance program offers new physicians assistance with moving and travel expenses while relocating to PEI. Physicians who are prepared to relocate to Prince Edward Island are eligible. Under the existing program, Moving Expense assistance ranges from \$3,500 to \$10,000 and is determined by the location from which their move originates. These allowances will be increased to a minimum of \$5,000 and a maximum of \$15,000. This initiative has been well received by physicians desiring to relocate, easing some of the financial strain associated with moving their families.

2.6 Family Medicine Residency Training Opportunities

In the past ten years, many Island students received residency training through programs based in Halifax, Saint John, Fredericton or Moncton. New initiatives are being pursued to allow these residents in training more opportunities to train on PEI with Island physicians. These opportunities could include full-time, on-Island training, or training in

specific areas of medicine such as pediatrics, psychiatry or emergency medicine.

Since the spring of 2004, key stakeholders in medical training have looked at various options for expansion of family medicine training available on PEI. During this past winter staff in the Department of Health renewed discussions with the Dalhousie Medical School to explore options for on-Island Medical Residency Program. In conjunction with Dalhousie and Memorial University Medical Schools, the Department of Health will be considering these options for expansion; this may include the development of Centres of Excellence for family medicine residents, a new Island-based Family Residency Training Program, or creation of a third-year extended Family Medicine Training Program in areas such as Geriatrics, Palliative Care and Emergency Medicine.

The Department of Health through the Medical Programs Division has set up a Project Team consisting of government employees and local physicians who will work with Dalhousie Medical School and Memorial University to develop timelines for the establishment of this training as soon as possible. It is our wish to ensure a quality educational experience can be provided across PEI.

2.7 Specialist Training Opportunities

Also critical to the acute care sector are Specialist physicians. We currently offer a wide range of specialized services across this province and that is only possible with the services of highly trained and experienced doctors.

Specialist training requires four to five years of university hospital-based training beyond the student's four year medical degree.

The Specialist Training initiative will provide funding to physicians who wish to pursue specialty training in areas of need and/or upgrade their current certification. Assistance will be in the form of a return-in-service commitment and the level of compensation is determined by the training university in consultation with the Department of Health. This initiative will assist PEI in obtaining physicians in areas of particular specialty need.

2.8 Preceptors

The key to providing family practice and specialty training opportunities on Prince Edward Island is the availability of dedicated teaching physicians referred to as preceptors. The number of preceptor physicians, both in family and specialty medicine, has increased substantially since the year 2000. Provision of student training opportunities in a physician's office has been a time honored tradition in medicine. This requires additional time by the physician and does cause disruption to the normal office routine. However, many physicians value this service to students and many patients are also appreciative of this interaction.

To avoid over-utilization of a small number of interested physicians, our enhanced strategy will place more students into group practice settings and hospital practice settings.

Incentives will be explored to recruit additional preceptors, retain those currently engaged in teaching and reward those who have dedicated considerable time and effort to the continuing education of future prospective physicians.

2.9 Islanders Studying Medicine Abroad

Islanders studying in foreign medical schools find the barriers substantial in enabling them to return to practice in Canada. It is the province's intent to ease those barriers, recruiting physicians with Island roots who have the greatest likelihood of making PEI a permanent place to practice medicine.

The Department will fund training positions to recruit Island medical graduates from non-Canadian medical schools who require additional training to meet the requirements of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the Medical Licensure Authority of Canada. These provincially-funded training positions will be assessed on a case by case basis. Acceptance into this program will also be required by Dalhousie University Post Graduate Training Committee and a position will need to be approved by a Residency Training Unit. Funding for these positions will be limited to a maximum of two per year at \$100,000 each. Upon completion of the residency training program the physician will be required to practice on PEI via a five (5) year return-in-service agreement.

2.10 Fee-for-Service Guaranteed Income

The province will develop a program whereby physicians who relocate to the province on a fee-for-service payment modality will be guaranteed a minimum annual medicare billing of \$200,000 for full time work.

This compares to a minimum guarantee of \$180,000 in Nova Scotia and \$175,000 in New Brunswick. This initiative will assist in providing patients with ongoing access to Family doctors and allow physicians some flexibility in choosing their preferred method of payment without suffering financial hardship.

2.11 Internationally Educated Health Professionals (IEHP) - IMG Component

This initiative will enhance the ability to recruit physicians to PEI through assistance in the assessment of credentials of International Medical Graduates (IMGs). PEI will partner with Nova Scotia to achieve maximum return for the investment through the assessment of IMGs, and participate in required educational enhancements recognized during the assessment. This partnership will also include the development of a physician-led mentorship program for physicians.

3. Retention Initiatives

An increased focus will be placed on the retention of our current physician workforce, including the following efforts:

- Regular follow-up with new physicians to ensure a positive experience integrating into the medical and social community;
- A coordinated approach for physicians to bring forward concerns with respect to adjusting to professional and personal life in the province; and
- Recognition for levels of long service and acquisition of special skills.

3.1 Clinical Skills Fellowship Fund

The Department of Health will continue to provide \$30,000 annually to the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island to administer the Clinical Skills Fellowship Fund. This fund enables physicians to participate in new clinical skills training, for example, clinical work in a supervised setting, post fellowship training with a preceptor, and fellowship training opportunities.

This allows existing Island physicians to learn a new technique or skill which can be provided to Islanders as part of improving their medical care.

3.2 Office Medical Equipment Fund

In the current medical practice environment, and with new graduates in particular, physicians are looking to work in a technology friendly environment. New technology not only supports quality patient care, it becomes a recruitment tool.

Over the past few years, we have implemented a province-wide digital radiology system (PACS) and we are currently building a province-wide hospital based Clinical Information System which will be state of the art in patient centered technology. This will allow physicians the opportunity for medical records and other clerical information to be sent anywhere in PEI when patients have to be moved between hospitals or other provincial facilities or when they are traveling and need access to their hospital records. We are also expanding this system into our network of Family Health Centers to support primary health care.

Physicians have expressed concern over the cost of office medical equipment. Due to changes in medical technology, more surgical procedures, which used to be done in a hospital setting, are being done in physician offices.

Our enhanced strategy recognizes this need and will provide up to \$30,000/year to provide this equipment where necessary.

This program will allow Island physicians the ability to provide new technology on a timely basis to patients.

An Office Medical Equipment Fund will be available to salaried physicians to assist in acquiring specialized office equipment necessary to their medical practice.

3.3 Physician Leadership Program

A Physician Leadership Bursary Program will be established whereby four bursaries will be available annually to Chiefs of Staff and Medical Directors to assist with the costs of attending physician leadership courses.

3.4 Continuing Medical Education

The Continuing Medical Education (CME) Program is an initiative which supports practicing physicians by providing educational opportunities to maintain, develop, and increase their practice skills and knowledge in the medical field. Keeping up to date in the profession maintains and promotes quality of the clinical practice.

Funding through the CME Program provides opportunities to physicians to participate in medical education programs, and reduce the cost for Island physicians to upgrade their skills. Such incentives are important in retaining existing physicians and attracting new graduates. This funding allows MSPEI to coordinate several CME days on PEI each year for all Island physicians.

A relationship has been developed between the Medical Education Program and the Medical Society to work in partnership to provide two such educational sessions per year, focused on teaching and practice topics.

The program funding was increased to \$140,000 in 2004/05.

3.5 Locum Support

The Locum Support Program offers support to physicians wishing to fill temporary physician locum vacancies in the province. Funding is used to identify locums, assist with their travel and accommodations, and remove barriers such as additional licensing and professional dues associated with practicing in an additional jurisdiction.

The Locum Support Program will attempt to provide continuous physician services when temporary physician vacancies exist in the province. The program provides physicians with coverage in their practices during times of temporary absence for reasons including extended vacation, continuing medical education, illness, and maternity leave. The priority of this program is to relieve some pressure of providing on-call services. Such relief provides a more attractive working environment for new and existing doctors, and a more balanced family life for busy physicians.

A centralized database will be developed, providing easy access to potential replacements for physicians seeking locum services and outline opportunities for locums who contact the recruitment program looking for opportunities.

Currently this program provides funding of \$100/day or \$500/week or \$2,000/month. Under our enhanced program physicians providing services to our rural hospital Emergency Rooms will be paid \$150/day or \$750/week or \$3,000/month. This increase will allow these physicians to offset some additional costs associated with working out of the urban areas.

4. Collaborative Initiatives

4.1 Community Development

In cooperation with communities across the province, community liaison leaders will be identified who will work with the Provincial Recruitment Coordinator. The role of the Community Liaison Leaders will be to facilitate the involvement of the communities in the recruitment and retention of physicians for the people of their communities. The ultimate goal is to create welcoming communities, enabling physicians from different countries and backgrounds to feel at home. This would involve the development of welcoming committees, welcoming incentives, orientation to community services, and the establishment of support systems to nurture the sense of ‘belonging’ and commitment.

The Department’s new recruitment coordination efforts will support the Island’s seven hospitals, the Family Health Centers, the private physician clinics, and individual community needs throughout the province. These partnerships will be critical for the successful recruitment of new doctors and retention of current physicians.

4.2 Marketing and Promotion

The Department will be reviewing its current advertising techniques to recruit physicians to vacancies in the province. They will work with Strategic Marketing and Design to develop a new design for advertisements and promotional material. Promotional material will be translated and made available in the French language. A student/resident

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newsletter for Island medical students and residents will be developed and published electronically on a monthly basis.

The web site for physician recruitment will be redesigned with the intent of providing easier access and more comprehensive information. Physicians will not only have access to a list of current vacancies but will also be able to obtain essential information about the position.

The Department will be developing data collection methods of recruitment activity which will be shared across the province on a regular basis. Efforts will be made to focus on testimonials and success stories adding a positive direction for the program.

CONCLUSION:

Our government has made many efforts in the past six years to remain competitive in the physician market.

We are confident our initiatives will allow competitive compensation, a fulfilling professional career, and a balanced lifestyle advantage that will allow us to provide stable access to medical services.

Our Department of Health would also like to recognize the work of the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island in this recruitment partnership. We will continue to work collaboratively to achieve our shared goals of providing high quality health care to Prince Edward Islanders.